

But I grew up in a national park, and I have never forgotten that progress uprooted from harmony with nature is a fool's errand. The more perfect Union of our Founders' dreams will always include the Earth that sustains us in body and spirit. Today we have honored three who made it so. Thank you very much.

Now I would like to ask Stephen Ambrose to come to the podium. But as I do, I would like to thank him for many things: for teaching America about World War II; for, most recently, making sure we know how the railroad was built across the country; and for all the works in between. But I rather suspect, having heard him talk about it, that nothing has quite captured his personal passion and the story of his family life like the odyssey of Lewis and Clark and the beauties that they found—that he and his family later discovered for themselves.

Steve.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:15 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to historian and author Stephen E. Ambrose; Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan, who wrote and produced the documentary "Lewis and Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery"; and Amy Mosset and James J. Holmberg, board members, National Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Council. The proclamations on the Buck Island Reef National Monument, Carrizo Plain National Monument, Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument, Minidoka Internment National Monument, Pompeys Pillar National Monument, Sonoran Desert National Monument, Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, and Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument are listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks to a Joint Session of the Arkansas State Legislature in Little Rock, Arkansas January 17, 2001

Thank you very, very much, and good afternoon. This is the first time in over 20 years I've been here when I don't have to get asked for a racing pass. [Laughter] And I heard somebody utter that hated phrase, and I understand that, for a variety of reasons, you've all gotten rid of that burden. So progress continues. [Laughter]

Governor Huckabee, Lieutenant Governor Rockefeller, Senator Beebe, Speaker Broadway, General Pryor, Secretary Priest, Jimmie Lou, Charlie, Gus, my friends. I'm delighted to be joined by Senator Pryor, about whom I would like to say more in a moment; Congressman Snyder, Congressman Ross, and a large number of people who came here with me from Washington.

I want to say that I am honored that the last trip of my Presidency is to come home to Arkansas and home to the legislature where I spent so many happy days. [Applause] Thank you.

There are a lot of people in this body who got their start in politics, working with me, a few who got their start in politics working against me—[laughter]—and some who got their

start doing both—[laughter]—depending on the issue and the time.

I brought with me a large number of people from Arkansas today. And I would like to mention them and a few others because I would like to begin by telling you that in these last 8 years, over 460 people from our home State worked in this administration and helped to make America a stronger country, and I am very grateful to all of them.

Mack McLarty, my first Chief of Staff, my first Envoy to the Americas, is here today. When he led the White House, we made four of the most important decisions we made during the entire 8 years: The historic balanced budget agreement where Senator Pryor cast the tie-breaking vote—so did everybody else; it passed by one vote in both Houses—the NAFTA agreement, which joined us with Mexico and Canada; the family and medical leave bill, the Brady law, and many others. He did a superb job.

I want to thank the three Arkansans who have served in my Cabinet: Rodney Slater, who is here today, our Secretary of Transportation; Hershel Gober, who is Secretary of Veterans Affairs and started out helping me with veterans

in Arkansas and in New Hampshire and has been absolutely superb; and James Lee Witt, who could not be here today because disasters don't only occur in Arkansas, there are other places as well, although I know you've been through a doozy lately. I want to thank Buddy Young, who worked with him as our regional official in Texas, who is here today.

Two other former legislators, in addition to Mack, have been part of this administration: Gloria Cabe, who served with many if not most of you here; her daughter also works in the White House, in the White House Counsel's Office, and she's here today; and Carl Whillock, who, after he was a legislator, became the president of Arkansas State University, head of the Co-ops. But he's most important to me because the first trip I took out of Fayetteville, in the first race I ever made in 1974, was across the hills of north Arkansas with Carl Whillock, when only my mother thought I had any business in that race. And I thank them for being here.

I'd also like to just acknowledge a few people. As I said, some of them are here, and some of them aren't. Bob Nash, who's been with me for 21 years, and his wonderful wife, Janis Kearney, my diarist, who's here. Nancy Harnreich, who's not here, who's been with me since I first ran for attorney general and has worked for me for 15 years, just got married to the brother of Montine McNulty, from Pine Bluff, and is about to move with him to Hong Kong; Stephanie Streett, my wonderful scheduler, who's going to be working with me here in Arkansas; Craig Smith, who did a great job in handling appointments here and was my political director, came home to actually work this trip, to go out at the grassroots where he began. I want to thank Mike Gaines, who ran the Parole Commission, still is; Ken Smith; Mike Gauldin; Jana Prewitt; Jim Bob Baker, who's done a great job in the Agriculture Department; Maria Haley; Robyn Dickey; young Debra Wood, who's been with me the whole 8 years, just working like a beaver in the White House; Mel French, our protocol chief and, for many years, her deputy, David Pryor, Jr.; and Marsha Scott, who has kept in touch with so many of you for me over these last 8 years.

I want to thank Wilbur Peer and Harold Gist. I want to thank Caroll Willis, who's been at the Democratic Committee this whole time, who's been wonderful beyond my words to say; and Lottie Shackelford, thank you. Debbie

Willhite and Ada Hollingsworth came home, and they helped us in a lot of ways, even though they weren't strictly on the payroll.

There are also tons of young people who have come to Washington and worked, just out of college or just out of law school. And I used to see them around and be so grateful that they could have an opportunity to have this experience, and I thank all of them for their work.

Three of my high school classmates are here today, who live in the Washington area and flew home with me: Dr. Jim French, who is a surgeon in Washington; Carolyn Staley, who runs the Adult Literacy Foundation; and my good friend Phil Jamison, who was the president of our class in high school, who retired from the Navy and stayed on to work in the Pentagon on nuclear weapons issues and did a lot of the pivotal work we have done with Russia over the last 8 years, which gave me an enormous amount of pride to know that a guy from my home town knew all about that and made me look like I knew what I was talking about from time to time.

I remember the first time I spoke here. It was in 1974, when I was permitted to come in here and ask for House members to help me in my very first race. I lost the election. If I hadn't, I probably never would have become President. Every time I see Congressman Hammerschmidt, I thank him for beating me.

I didn't lose my passion for public service, and it's been with me ever since. In the last 25 years I have stood in the well of this chamber many times. I have lobbied in the halls and the committee room back there as attorney general, when David Pryor was my Governor. I stood here five times to take the oath of office as Governor of my State. Two months out of every 2 years, with the help of a number of my legislative aides who are here today, Bill Clark and Hal Honeycutt and Bill Bowen, who was briefly my chief of staff, when even I was intimidated, we would argue and argue and work and work until we hammered into law our dreams for the future of this State.

I'd like to thank some people who aren't here, some of whom are no longer living: the late Judge Frank Holt, who gave me my first chance to work in a campaign in 1966; my great friend Senator Bill Fulbright, who lived long enough to see me become President and to receive the Medal of Freedom, who gave me a job when

I was flat broke, just so I could finish college, and I'll never forget it.

I would like to thank the Members of the congressional delegation, present and past, who stood with me in these last 8 years, in the tough times and the good times, especially David Pryor and Dale Bumpers, without whom I can't imagine how this last 8 years would have been possible. I thank you, my friends.

I'd like to thank Hillary. If she hadn't moved to Arkansas and married me, I doubt the rest of this trip would have happened. She was a great first lady for this State. She did an amazing job in Washington and did things that no one has ever done that will benefit this country for decades to come. And I am so proud of her, I could pop today. I want you to remember when she does great things in the United States Senate, she learned all of her politics wrestling with you. [*Laughter*]

I am delighted that my mother-in-law, Dorothy Rodham, is here, and my stepfather, Dick Kelley—I thank them for being here; Lynda Dixon, who was my secretary as Governor and has run our office here in Little Rock, along with Representative Mary Anne Salmon.

And I am delighted that Chelsea could come home with me. As it happens, on the way home, on the way here from the airport, we passed two of her schools, Mann and Booker Arts Magnet School, where she spent so many happy years and learned a great deal about her lessons and about life. And the friends, the schools, the churches, the associations she had here had a lot to do with the person she is today, and I'm very grateful for that.

Finally, I would like to thank the people of this State who elected me five times, for sending me to Washington to carry the lessons that I learned from you and the progress that we tried to make here to the rest of the country.

Everything that I have been able to do as President is, in no small measure, a result of the life I lived and the jobs I had in Arkansas. My conviction that politics requires a vision and a strategy based on sound ideas and a belief that you can make a difference—from education reform to economic policy, to welfare and health care, to building one America, those things were formed here.

I know that when a person gets ready to check out of an office, there's always a lot of retrospectives. And I have followed them in the local press: Did this administration make a dif-

ference for Arkansas? Did it make a difference for America? So I am going to do an unconventional thing; I think I will start with the facts.

First of all, when I came in, I think a lot of people thought, well, you know, we'd just move the whole Federal Government down here. But the problem is, we had a \$290 billion deficit, and then the price of getting rid of the deficit turned out to be losing the Congress for our party. And so then the people that were in control had other ideas about where the money ought to go from time to time, when we finally had a little.

Notwithstanding that, look what happened this year. We funded the Delta Regional Authority, \$20 million the first year. We got funds for the Great River Bridge and for the Highway 82 Bridge. We had 500—Rodney said—Rodney said in this year's transportation budget there's \$592 million for Arkansas. That's more than your per capita share.

We worked very hard, especially with Senator Lincoln and Congressman Snyder, to save the mission of the Little Rock Air Force Base and to get the C-130J there. There is \$25 million in the budget this year for a simulator and millions more for an operations and maintenance center. I think you're okay.

We got \$18 million for a quality evaluation center at the Pine Bluff arsenal. And as we try to reduce the dangers of chemical and biological warfare, I think that arsenal can have a very important mission in America's future. I've talked to Representative Ross about it, and I hope, after I come down here, I can work with you to think about what it should be doing in the 21st century.

There were \$38 million for seven water projects, an expansion of the Forrest City prisons, \$5 million for research for the Arkansas Children's Hospital. We funded the Dale Bumpers Rice Research Center and the Agriculture Research Center. The Little Rock VA got some money for a research annex. I am very happy that we got \$2½ million for the Diane Blair Center at the University of Arkansas. And we finally got the upper payment limit for the medical center okayed, and that's worth \$35 million, and I think it saved the medical center. At least that's what Dale Bumpers tells me it did.

Earlier, of course, there was over \$40 million for the airport in northwest Arkansas. And when my library and center get built here, I expect it will be a project on the order of \$200 million,

something that I believe will make a big difference, not only to central Arkansas but to the whole State.

But what's really important, it seems to me, is that Arkansas shared in what happened to the country. So when people ask you if it made a difference, here are a few numbers you might want to keep in mind: 35 million people have taken advantage of the family and medical leave law, which I signed after it was vetoed by people who said that it would hurt the economy. If I was trying to hurt the economy, I did a poor job.

We have 22½ million new jobs, a 30-year low in unemployment, a 40-year low in women's unemployment, the lowest Hispanic and African-American unemployment ever recorded. Thirteen million more people get some form of college aid, thanks to the HOPE scholarship, the lifetime learning tax credit, the Pell grant, which will go to \$3,750 this year. Seven million people have moved off welfare—a 60-percent drop in the welfare rolls; 3.3 million children now have health insurance under the Children's Health Insurance Program. And Governor, I want to thank you for your interest, and Mrs. Huckabee, in getting our kids health insurance. It's the first time in a dozen years the number of people without health insurance is going down.

Two million children have moved out of poverty; 1.3 million children are in after-school programs or summer school programs as the result of Federal funds that did not exist on the day I became President. In 4 years we've gone from an experimental program at \$1 million to one of over \$1.5 billion, serving 1.3 million children. There are 4 million latch-key kids in this country, a lot of them in Arkansas, and I think we ought to keep working until every child has a wholesome school to stay in after school rather than going back on the street, something to say yes to, rather than getting in trouble.

Six hundred and eleven thousand felons, fugitives, and stalkers were unable to buy handguns because of the Brady law, and yet, not a single Arkansas hunter missed an hour in the deer woods; no sport shooter missed a single contest. Two hundred thousand young Americans have served in AmeriCorps, a lot of them right here in Arkansas. When the tornado hit the capital neighborhoods—and I saw all the trees blown down in the backyard of the Governor's mansion, and I went over to the grocery store that was flattened—I saw young AmeriCorps kids

from all over this country, working here in Arkansas to try to help fix things and clean things up, and I am grateful for that. And I might say, I learned a couple of days ago that those 200,000 people in 6 years are more people than have served in the Peace Corps in the entire 40 years of its existence. [*Applause*] Thank you.

One hundred and twenty-five thousand community police officers on the street; crime at a 25-year low; 37,000 teachers hired all over America in the early grades, on our way to 100,000 and a class size average of 18 in the first three grades; 90 percent of our kids immunized against serious childhood diseases for the first time in the history of the country. We had Betty Bumpers and Rosalynn Carter over at the White House the other day to celebrate that. The largest increase in Head Start in history; the highest homeownership in history—the first time we've ever had more than two-thirds of the American people in their own homes.

We have a \$500-a-child tax credit; we have 200,000 more people getting child care assistance. The student loan program costs \$9 billion less than it did when I started, to people who are borrowing. The direct loan program saves the average college student \$1,300 on a \$10,000 loan. Interest rates, long-term, are lower today than they were when I took office, even though we've had an 8-year expansion. Average interest rates, because of turning deficits to surplus, saves people \$2,000 a year on \$100,000 home mortgage.

We've had over 300 trade agreements in the last year alone, agreements with China, with Africa and the Caribbean Basin, with Vietnam, and with Jordan. We have the smallest Government in 40 years, since Dwight Eisenhower was President of the United States, since 1960. Two-thirds of the regulations under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act have been eliminated. Hundreds of programs are gone, and I'll give anybody \$5 that can mention five of them. I take it back. I'll give you \$100 if you can mention five of them. [*Laughter*]

When we started, the deficit was \$290 billion. Now we have a \$240 billion surplus. In our last three budgets, we will pay down—pay down—about \$600 billion of the Nation's debt, putting us on track, if we stay there, to be out of debt by the end of the decade, for the first time since Andrew Jackson was President, in 1835.

This has allowed us, among other things, to pass pension protection legislation that has strengthened the pension protection for 40 million Americans, to put 25 years on the life of Medicare for the first time in 25 years. And if the interest savings from paying down the debt as a result of Social Security taxes are put against Social Security—which is something I've been trying to do for 2 years—if they do that next year, it will extend the life of Social Security 54 years, to 2054, almost long enough to get us beyond the lifespan of all the baby boomers, when the demographics of America will begin to right themselves again.

We have cleaner air, cleaner water, cleaner drinking water, safer food, twice as many toxic waste dumps cleaned up as in the previous 12 years. And today we announced that we were setting aside eight more national monuments, which means this administration has now protected more land than any administration in the history of the country, except that of Theodore Roosevelt.

Per capita income after inflation is up an average of \$6,300. Median income is over \$40,000 for the first time in the history of the country, and wages have gone up 9 percent, as poverty has dropped 20 percent. So for the first time in decades, this was an economic recovery that I'm proud to say did produce more billionaires and millionaires, but also helped people in the lowest 20 percent of the wage earning bracket with the highest percentage gains in the last 3 years.

So that's what happened. And what I want to say to you is, one of the things that I tried to remember every day was that being President is a job, like being Governor was a job. And it matters how hard you work, but it also matters whether you've got the right ideas. And a lot of the ideas that I had came out of the experiences we shared together during the 1980's, when times were tough in Arkansas. We did not have an unemployment rate below the national average in the last 10 years I was Governor a single time, until 1992, when we ranked second in the country in job growth.

But I learned a lot as we worked, day-in and day-out, together, across party lines, across regional lines, to try to actually do the people's business. And I've said before and I'll say again, one of the biggest hazards of any national capital is—America is no different from others; I followed this pretty closely in other countries—

is when you set up a Government so far away from the people, it is easy, when you realize maybe you get your 15 seconds on the evening news, to believe that politics is all about rhetoric and positioning. But it's not. It's a job. It really matters what you do, whether your ideas work, and whether you have a team of people who can translate those ideas into reality.

I tell everybody who listens to me that it's a team sport, that I may be the captain of the team, but if you don't have a team, you're going to lose every time. And so just once more, I would like to ask all the people who came here with me today from Arkansas, who have been part of this last 8 years, to stand, because they were a big part of our team. You all stand up. *[Applause]*

Now, I'd like to just mention three or four specific areas where I think your relationship to the National Government is important and where I hope our country will continue to move forward. The strategy we followed in education, which is still key to everything else, was very, very important, basically, higher standards, more accountability, greater investment, and equal opportunity—a simple strategy, but it's working.

We provided, for the first time, funds for States to identify failing schools and help local districts to turn them around or put them under new management or start charter schools. There was one in the country when we started; there are over 2,000 now. Reading and math scores are up in the country; SAT scores are at a 30-year high, even though more people from more disadvantaged backgrounds are taking them; a 50-percent increase in the number of kids in America taking advanced placement tests; 300 percent increase in Hispanic students over the last 7 years; 500 percent increase in African-American students. The African-American high school graduation rate is virtually equal to the white high school graduation rate in the country, for the first time in the history of America.

And more and more people are going on to college. But we have some significant challenges out there. We have the largest and most diverse group of students in our schools in history. Arkansas is now in the top three States in the percentage growth of its Hispanic population, as all of you doubtless know better than I.

I just hope that you will continue to work and to urge the Federal Government to work with you in making progress in these areas. We

got a billion dollars-plus, a little more than a billion dollars this year, for the first time, to try to just give funds to States and school districts to help repair old schools or grievously overcrowded schools. And I think that's very important.

There is a limit to how much we can ever expect local property tax payers to pay, and very often—you have two things going on now—very often the places where the need is the greatest, the property tax base is the smallest, which we know a lot about in Arkansas. And secondly, ironically, even though we've got the biggest school population in history, we have a smaller percentage of those students—excuse me, a smaller percentage of property tax owners with kids in the schools—property tax payers with kids in the schools.

So we've got to work this out. Now, when we started this, there were a lot of people who had genuine reservations—and this is not a political deal in the traditional sense in Washington. There were a lot of people who honestly thought that the Federal Government should not be giving money to States and the local school districts to help with school construction or repair because it wasn't something we did. And I agree that normally we shouldn't do that. Normally, we should either give you the money to spend as you need it or target it on the poorest people or the areas of greatest need, like the need to hook up all our classrooms to the Internet.

But this is an unusual time. This is the first time—the last 3 years—the first time that we've ever had more school students than we had in the baby boom years right after World War II. And the student population is much more diverse. And after World War II, the National Government did help States and school districts to deal with the school facilities problem.

So I hope that you will help us with that, because I think the unmet need is somewhere over \$100 billion for adequate school facilities for our kids. We also are putting more funds than ever before, with total bipartisan agreement in Congress, into teacher training, continuing development, and funding the master teacher program to try to certify board-certified master teachers all across the country, until we get up to 100,000 of them, which will be enough for one in every school in the country. I think that's very, very important. But I would urge you to continue to do that.

The second thing I'd like to say is, I think that it's very important that we keep trying to refine the partnership between the National Government and the States in the area of economic development. Except for education, I guess I worked harder on just trying to get and keep jobs when I was here than anything else, and a lot of you worked very closely with me. I'm very grateful for the progress that has been made, and I'm especially grateful that we have got a focus now on the people and places that have been left behind. Because, in spite of this long recovery, there are still places in mountain counties in Appalachia and in north Arkansas, there are places in the Mississippi Delta and other rural areas, there are inner-city neighborhoods, and worst of all, a lot of our Native American reservations, where you can't tell there has been an 8-year recovery. I was on the Pine Ridge Reservation a little over a year ago in South Dakota, which is near Mount Rushmore, and one of the most historic places in all American Indian culture. The unemployment rate there is 72 percent. And as a result, all the social indicators are terrible. There are a lot of problems there. But intelligence is evenly distributed. I was taken around there by a young girl who had to move out of her home, was taken in by friends, living in the back of a trailer where there were, like, 11 people living. She was one of the most intelligent young people I met in the whole 8 years I was President. She deserves the same future everybody else does.

That's why we passed the empowerment zone program that Vice President Gore ran for 8 years, and did a brilliant job, I think, where we had these zones. But I thought we ought to do something to try to essentially make every area in America that was insufficiently developed eligible for the same investment incentives that we presently give American investors to invest in poor communities in Africa or Latin America or poor countries in Asia.

That's essentially what this new markets legislation is all about. We did it in partnership with the Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert, a Republican from Illinois, and I'm very grateful to him for the work we did together, and any number of other legislators who are active in it—J.C. Watts from Oklahoma, a lot of you know; Danny Davis, from Illinois, who is from Arkansas, the Congressman from Chicago.

So I hope that you and, Governor, the economic development agencies of the State, will look for ways to maximize the usage of this new markets legislation, because, essentially, we've got one more piece that I think will pass early in this new session of Congress, but what we're trying to do is to give people the incentives to put money into places of high unemployment, where people are willing to work, and to spread the risk.

So essentially, what it does, it sets up the system where you can get about a 25 percent tax credit for investing in areas with very high unemployment, which means your risk is only 75 percent of what it would otherwise be, and if you have to borrow money, that up to two-thirds of an investment could be guaranteed by a Government mechanism, which would give you about 2 percent lower interest rates, which would further reduce the risk, which is essentially what we do when we try to set up trade and investment agreements all around the world in developing countries, where we have an interest in building the trading partners for the future and helping democracy. I could never understand why we wouldn't do it for people here in America. And I believe we have a unique opportunity here to bring free enterprise to people who have been left behind.

I know Arkansas is small enough, you all know each other well enough, you've had enough experience with this, we went through all that nightmare of the eighties, that it seems to me that this State is in a position maybe to take more advantage of that and also to identify what still needs to be done, what the National Government can do, than any place else.

I should also tell you that we're now going to have 40 of the empowerment zones that we had—not that many, but we had 20 to 30—and we're going to have 40 other communities, enterprise communities, designed by the Republican Members of Congress. We said, "Look, why don't we just test this? You guys design 40 communities that will get the special tax treatment the way you want it. We'll have 40 that work the way we think would work best. We'll identify 80 places that will get extra help. And then we'll just see what works, and then we'll do what works. If your idea works better than ours, we'll do yours. If ours works better, we'll do ours. And if some of each works best, we'll do that."

So there will be approximately 50 or more new community designations coming out next year, and I would like to see some of those come to Arkansas, as well. And you know, you'll have to go through the application process and all of that. But I really would urge you to make sure that Arkansas gets a substantial share of those new community opportunities because they get extra help to get investment there. And I think that will work.

A third thing I would like to say a little something about is welfare reform. We had a huge debate, you remember, back in '96, on welfare, but we passed a bipartisan bill that had a majority of both parties in both Houses. And you know how it works, and it has worked very well. Arkansas's rolls are down 60 percent, and I applaud you for that.

Now, what I would like to suggest is that we won't know how well this really works until the economy slows down, which is bound to happen someday, but I don't think it's imminent. I don't believe we've repealed the laws of the business cycle, but the truth is, because our markets are open, it's a great, great hedge against inflation. And because of the technology sector, we continue to increase productivity. And if we keep driving down interest rates by paying the debt down, which is the main thing the Government can do, the aggregate economy will continue, I think, to do very well.

But it seems to me that we need to really kind of—it's time now. This will be the fifth year since the welfare reform bill was passed. And we need to look and see where it's working and what the problems are. And what about people that are hard to place? Are we doing enough on job training? Have we done enough on transportation? Are people so concentrated that are still on the rolls or people that keep dropping out and go back in a hurry, that those are the places that need the new markets designation and help? These are the kinds of things that I think ought to be done.

But one of the great stories of the last 8 years is that all of us who thought poor people would rather work than draw a Government check for not working were right, but that people still have to be able, even on modest wages, to succeed at work and at home, which is one of the reasons I am disappointed we didn't raise the minimum wage again last year. I think it will go up fairly soon in this new session of Congress.

But we've got to make sure that people who are working, particularly if they're single parents, can do a good job with their kids, because raising children is still the most important job of any society. So again, our State is—ironically, it's small enough but also diverse enough, that you can really kind of do a mid-course check here, see what's working, what's not, what should the Congress do, what should the new administration do to help you make this work.

But this is an enormous story, to see these rolls cut 60 percent, and people, just like we always knew, preferring work to idleness as long as they can take care of their kids.

Now, one other thing I'd like to mention, and I alluded to it earlier. I know you've had some vigorous debates here in the legislature about how best to cover children and what should be done on health care. But let me just get to the bottom line. I'll state it again.

This Children's Health Insurance Program, which is the biggest expansion of health care since Medicaid was passed in '65, was a part of the Balanced Budget Act in '97. Then it took about a year for the States to get their programs up. So essentially, in 2 years, 3.3 million kids have gotten health insurance. And it's the first thing that's been done in a dozen years to get the number of people without health insurance going down. And we all know why it went up. Insurance rates went up; it was harder and harder for small businesses to cover their employees. And when they couldn't cover their employees, the employees themselves weren't making enough money to buy insurance. So we've got the numbers going down now.

There is enough money here in the Congress—they have enough money in the projected 10-year budget to afford a substantial tax cut, to keep paying the debt down, to meet our investment commitments at the national level, and still expand health care coverage. I believe the best way to do it is to work with the States to add the parents of the children who have been insured under the CHIP program.

Now, some of those parents, a few of them, have insurance at work where they can get insurance, but they can't insure their kids. But most of them don't have anything. And if you did that, if you did just that, that would cover over 25 percent of all the people left in America who don't have health insurance—just that one thing. And the money is there to do it.

The other thing that I've been trying to get the Congress to do that is—really there's nothing for you to do, but I think we ought to do it—is to give a tax credit to people who are over 55 and have either dropped out or retired early and lost their health insurance on the job, or who lost their jobs or who work in jobs without health insurance. They're not old enough to get into Medicare. Without in any way weakening Medicare, if we gave them a 25-percent tax credit, we could let them buy into Medicare at cost when they're over 55.

This is a big deal. And that's 300,000 or 400,000 people. And that's another big chunk of folks. But the thing I would like you to focus on—there will be a debate in this coming Congress, and I think there will be bipartisan interest now that the CHIP program is working so well, in adding people to the ranks of health insurance. And back in '94, when we had this big fight about it, we had a big fight because the economy was bad, and there was no way to cover everybody except with an employer mandate, which couldn't pass because the economy was bad, or with more money, which we didn't have unless we raised taxes, and we couldn't do it because we just raised taxes to get the deficit down.

Now, we are in a position to fund this. And it's very important that it be done in the right way. And the States, I think, have experience about how this might be done. So I would hope that this is one of the things that you would be working very closely with your congressional delegation on, because it really is the opportunity of a lifetime. I mean, for 50 years American Presidents and Congresses and people around the country have been trying to figure out how to get health care coverage to everybody. And Hawaii, Minnesota, and North Dakota are about the only people that have done it—that is, that are substantially over 90 percent. So I hope you will do that.

Another thing I think that might be very valuable to Arkansas is that in the previous campaign, President-elect Bush said that he would put more money into public health centers if he were elected. And I guess it's the same as it was, but when I left office, we were, for example, giving—85 percent of all the immunizations in the State of Arkansas were being given by the county health departments. Even upper-income people were taking their kids to county health departments because doctors

didn't want to buy the liability insurance, and so they'd just go and do that.

But I think that if there is going to be funding for health units, which I think would be a very good thing, then the States ought to have some significant input into how it's going to be done, so the money will be spent in a way that the States—and the Southern States, by the way, in general, have historic—for historic reasons, have relied on county health units, public health units, more than the rest of the country. So that's something else I think you ought to be looking for in this coming session of Congress. Are they going to do this? If so, how's the money going to be spent? What do you have to say about it? How can it help the health of the people of Arkansas, especially the children of Arkansas, in the most effective way?

Let me just make one final comment. I think one of the most important contributions that our administration made to life in Washington in the last 8 years was arguing that we had to find a way to be at peace with each other and to work together across all of our differences. If you follow American politics as closely as all of you do, you know that a lot of our differences are almost cultural: race, religion, the people who live in the West as opposed to people who live in the East, and their attitude about protection of public lands. Is it gun control or gun safety? All these things that keep—politicians just stay away from a lot of these issues because you're afraid, no matter which way you move and what you say, it will all blow up on you, and you can't get much done, but you lose votes no matter what you do.

But the truth is, in a highly diverse society, where we're growing more and more interdependent both within our country and around the world, with the rest of the world, we have no choice but to confront a lot of these things. So the work that we've done with this Office of One America, I think, is very, very important, with our race report and all of that.

On Martin Luther King's Holiday, Monday, I sent a report to Congress on where we are, what progress we've made in building one America in the last 8 years, and what I thought the unmet challenges were, from dealing with the challenge of racial profiling and law enforcement to closing disparities in health and education, to giving back the right to vote to ex-offenders once their sentence is discharged,

something that the Arkansas Legislature did without a word of criticism in 1977—1977. This is a big deal. Six hundred thousand people every year get out of the penitentiary. You all want me to give more money every year for that prison over in Forrest City; people here in the room have lobbied for it. Most people who go in, get out. And we have a huge collective interest as a people in seeing that when people get out of prison, they obey the law.

You know, you don't want to dog people to the end of their days. If you say, "Here's your penalty; serve it," they serve it. And then they get out and say, "And now we want you to be a good, successful, law-abiding citizen, and by the way, here's a 50-pound weight we want you to wear around your neck for the rest of your life. But you've got to do as well as we do." I just think it's a mistake. And we have got to find a way to figure out how, once people pay and they get out—600,000 a year, that's a lot of people—we can bring them back into America. I mean, the whole purpose of defined punishment is to say when it's over, "You did it, but it's over."

And I can tell you, I'm going through this now—Meredith Cabe is one of my pardon attorneys—just dealing with the mechanics of this, I just don't—most people who apply for a Presidential pardon do it because they want to vote again. But a lot of people don't even know how to do it.

I'm not going to be President in 3 days. We're still getting applications in the mail, and it's crazy. Most of these people should just be able to vote and be full citizens, because they've paid. I think it's an important issue. And as I said, we did it here in 1977, but I'll bet you most people in Arkansas don't know that's the law, because only about 14 States have done it. So people just assume it's not there.

The other thing that I recommended and I think is very important is not that we re-litigate the last election but that we make sure that in every future election in every State in the country, voting is clear, simple, unquestionable, and people's votes get counted. And I asked the incoming administration to appoint a commission headed probably by President Ford and President Carter, but something totally bipartisan, just to look at this. Because we all know—I know the history of voting, and voting machines are good in a lot of ways because you can't vote twice in the same race on a voting

machine because you can't pull two levers now. But they're expensive. They're hard to maintain. When the ones you bought don't work anymore, they're hard to get parts to repair, and so that's how people got into these punch card systems.

I personally think that the pencil system I use on my absentee ballot here from Pulaski County is a lot better, a lot less subject to messing up, and can also be counted by machine, so it can be counted more quickly. But this is something that every State needs to be sure of.

The States in this country have done, I think, a very good job of making it easier for people to vote. One reason it took so long to count these votes in Washington State is—it took 2 weeks or 3 weeks to count the votes because over a third of the votes were cast by paper ballots in advance of election day.

By the way, it's going to change everything for all the politicians. There is a congressional seat in New Mexico that was won twice by the candidate of one party on election day, and both times the other candidate was elected because she got so many votes in the 3 weeks leading up to election.

So it is going to change the nature of politics. But the main thing is it's voter friendly. So the idea of making it easier for people to vote is taking hold in America. But until the recent election, I don't think any of us—I know I hadn't—we hadn't paid enough attention to the mechanics of voting. For example, the biggest reject State in the country—that is where people vote, but their votes are not counted—I think was Idaho last year. But because Idaho is overwhelmingly a Republican State, the races aren't close, so if 5 percent of the votes don't get counted, it never makes any difference. So nobody gets upset. They never think about it.

But now we know that this is not just a problem in Florida; it's a problem in other places. And we need to look at everywhere the mechanics of voting. Because, you just think about it, in Washington, DC, across the river, in the Alexandria public school system, there are people from 180 different national and ethnic groups in one school system. Their parents speak over 100 different languages as their native language. And as I said, I know Arkansas is one of the top three States in the country in the growth of Hispanic students. As this country gets more and more diverse and more and more commingled, it will be more and more important for

people to believe, not only when their candidates win but especially when their candidates lose, that the whole thing was done in the best possible way.

So that's another thing that I would like to see not only this State and this State legislature weigh in but every State in the country. This is something we can do as a people that there ought to be no difference of opinion on. Just—we can figure out the most cost-effective way to get the mechanics right. But in this case, the whole integrity of our democracy, over the long run, depends upon it.

Let me just say one other thing. I went back and read my first inaugural address in 1979. I got a little plaque from the Arkansas Gazette when I gave it, that I put on the wall in the White House, and I had it up there every day I was President. And I had a line in it that said, "The people of Arkansas have two emotions in great abundance, hope and pride. Without them, there is no such thing as quality of life. With them, there is nothing we cannot achieve."

I will leave office at noon on the 20th, amazingly grateful that somehow the mystery of this great democracy gave me the chance to go from a little boy on South Hervey Street in Hope, Arkansas, to the White House. I am quite sure there was more than a little luck in that and good fortune. I am absolutely positive that I may be the only person ever elected President who owes his election purely to his personal friends, without whom I would never have won. But I know this: If we have the right vision, if we have good ideas, and if we always believe, if we are proud of our country and its history and our future is absolutely filled with hope, then the best days of this country will always be ahead.

After I became President, I went back and read all the founding documents again, to make sure that I knew them as nearly by heart as I could. And when the Founders kicked our country off with the Declaration of Independence, they said they pledged their lives, their fortunes, their sacred honor to the enterprise of forming a more perfect Union—not a perfect Union but a more perfect Union. And they were smart people. What they said is, if we get this right, then all the people who come after us will always be able to do better. There will always be new challenges, that as long as we are on this Earth and finite human beings, God

meant us to have new problems. But we will always be able to form a more perfect Union.

I will leave that office at noon on January 20th more idealistic than I was the day I took the oath of office 8 years before, largely because it worked out the way I thought it would based on what I learned and how I lived here.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:07 p.m. in the House Chamber at the Arkansas State Capitol Building. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Mike Huckabee of Arkansas, and his wife, Janet; Lt. Gov. Win Rockefeller of Arkansas; State Senator Mike Beebe, president pro tempore of the senate; State Representatives Shane Broadway, speaker of the house, and Mary Anne Salmon; State Attorney General Mark Pryor; Arkansas Secretary of State Sharon Priest; State Treasurer Jimmie Lou Fisher; Arkansas Commissioner of State Lands Charlie Daniels; State Auditor Gus Wingfield; former Senator David H. Pryor; Raymond Lloyd (Buddy) Young, Region VI Director, Federal Emergency Management Agency; Carl Whillock, Special Assistant to the President, Department of Agriculture; Montine McNulty, executive direc-

tor, Arkansas Hospitality Association; Jana Prewitt, Director of External Affairs, Department of the Interior; Robyn Dickey, former White House Office Deputy Social Secretary; Debra Wood, White House Office Director of Student Correspondence; Wilbur Peer, Acting Administrator, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, Department of Agriculture; Harold Gist, Associate Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Department of Transportation; Carroll Willis, director, and Lottie Shackelford, vice chair, Democratic National Committee; Debbie Willhite, co-executive director, 1997 Presidential Inaugural Committee; Ada Hollingsworth, owner, A&A Travel Services; Carolyn Staley, deputy director, National Institute for Literacy; former Representative John Paul Hammerschmidt; former Arkansas State Highway Commissioner L.W. (Bill) Clark; Hal Honeycutt, former director, Arkansas State Game and Fish Commission; Bill Bowen, former chief of staff to the Governor of Arkansas; former Senator Dale Bumpers, and his wife, Betty; and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks to the Community in Little Rock January 17, 2001

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you. I want to——

Audience member. We love you!

The President. That's what I want to say, too. I want to thank you for coming, and I want to thank you for waiting. We had a wonderful moment in the Arkansas Legislature. I got to speak to the legislature and see a lot of my old friends. And you know, with term limits there's been a lot of turnover, and about a third of the legislature, as nearly as I can tell, got their start working in one of my campaigns. [Laughter] So I had a wonderful time.

Thank you, Mayor. I want to thank Rodney Slater and Hershel Gober. for doing a great job in the President's Cabinet and being part of this vast array of Arkansans who came down here with me today. Thank you, Vic Snyder, for your friendship and support. Thank you,

Mike Ross, for making the campaign and going to Congress. We're proud of you.

Thank you, Senator Pryor, for coming home today so we could be together on my last trip to Arkansas. Maybe by the time I get around to writing a book, I'll be able to do some justice to the absolutely essential personal and political role David Pryor played in the success of this administration in the last 8 years. And I'm very grateful to him.

I want to thank all the State officials who came out. Thank you, Sharon Priest. Thank you, Jimmie Lou and Charlie, Gus, Mark Pryor. I want to thank Little Joe and the BK's. It's just like being home. And I want to thank the Trumpet and Zion Church choir.

You know, Jim Dailey said about everything I could think of to say. And he gave a terrific speech, and I hope somebody for me still got it on tape. I'm going to play that some day